[Personal History of Ovide Morin]

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PERSONAL HISTORY OF OVIDE MORIN, FRENCH CANADIAN

Ovide Morin, Sr. 224 Bosworth Street, Old Town, Maine. (Bosworth Street is on Treat and Webster Island, popularly known as “French Island” because the population is almost exclusively French.) Mr. Morin, a French Canadian, was born in St. Epphane, (pronounced Saint F and A) Quebec, in 1862. He is 76 years old, has a wife and eight children - all boys except two, and all married except two of the boys. Three of the boys operate the O. G. Morin wholesale and retail fruit business. They deal in fruit, candy, ice cream, cigars, etc., and own much real estate in Old Town including the brick block which houses their

business, and doctor's offices on the floor above. They make a high quality ice cream. Mr. Morin came to Old Town in 1881 when he was nineteen years old, and has lived here ever since. Had very little schooling, but reads French and speaks English with a noticeable accent. Vocabulary is not extensive. Is very intelligent. Has worked on the river, in sawmills, and as a carpenter and a brick and stone mason. Catholic. Lives next to his married son, Ovide, Jr. Both houses are good. Mr. Morin's house is very clean inside and is tastefully and expensively furnished. He is about 5 feet 6 inches tall, tanned, of wiry build. Hair is thick and iron gray, and his brown eyes are bright and alert. Appears to be in the fifties rather than in the seventies. Has a wide mouth that seems to be a characteristic of this branch of the Morin family.

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Wife is an extremely attractive woman in looks and manner. Seems to be younger than her husband. Has remarkably attractive hair - white, wavy, and very “alive” looking.

Probably Mr. Morin himself did not save very much, but his sons, who started and who operate the O. G. Morin business, are among the wealthy men of the town. They are all very pleasant to meet.

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THE LIFE OF OVIDE MORIN, FRENCH CANADIAN

(As Told By Himself To Robert F. Grady) Mr. Morin: “Well, I don't know what I can tell you. I don't speak English very well, and maybe my wife could tell you more about things. If we could speak in French -” Mrs. Morin: “Oh, you can talk well enough to tell him what he wants to know.” Mr. Morin: “Well, I was born in St. Epphane that's what it is in French - can you handle that all right?”

(He repeated the name two or three times, and I got it down as St. Stephanie, but after I spelled out what I had written, Mrs. Morin wrote it out for me correctly. It's pronounced St. F. and A so my mistake was a pardonable one, though it wasn't due to a

mispronounciation on the part of Mr. Morin.) Mr. Morin: “St. Epphane was just a little place, I couldn't say how many people lived there. Yes, it was about as big as West Old Town. (150 - 200 population). There was only a little church there and a little school. Just a lot of farms there. My father helped to build that church. He was a carpenter and a stone mason and a shoe maker. Some times when he had a small piece of hide left over he would make a pair of moccasins for some child who had nothing to wear on his feet. Some times there were children up there who had to go barefoot in the winter time.”

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Mrs. Morin: “Do you know there are some places up in this country, near Fort Kent and the border, where conditions are about the same as they were in Canada then. The children have nothing to wear on their feet in the cold weather, some times they have little to eat and no money to buy anything. They have tables made of three boards nailed to the wall, and all they have for chairs are benches made of wood like you see sometimes. Those places are off the line of travel and people don't see much of them. It is terrible that such things should be, and it is too bad that something can't be done about it.” Mr. Morin: “Some farmers can take a load of vegetables, or grain, or fruit to the big city and bring back money from the sale of their produce. But they have to have money first to buy horses, or tractors, or fertilizer. It takes money to make money, and those poor people haven't any.

Conditions were very bad up there. Mister, what would you think of anyone who had to work a month to get $5.00 - and sometimes you had a hard time to get the money, at that. 50 cents a day was big pay. When I was young I worked sometimes helping farmers pick their potatoes. One man offered me 25 cents a day if I would work for him. We worked from four oclock in the morning until six oclock at night, and then the farmer put us down cellar storing the potatoes until twelve oclock at night. I told him I'd work for twenty - five cents a day, but I wouldn't do two day's work in one. I told him he hired me for twenty - five cents a day, and If he wanted me to do two day's work in one day he'd have to pay me fifty cents. He says, ‘Oh, come on. Get through with the job and I'll pay you twenty five cents

extra 3 when we get done. But I wouldn't do it, no sir. I wouldn't work two days for twenty five cents.

“My father worked twelve and fourteen hours a day. That was a little saw mill up there, and it bad only one saw. The end of the log stuck up, and one man had a hold of the saw up above, and another man held it below. They sawed like this:”

(From Mr. Morin's description I gathered that the sawing was done in this fashion:)

“It was done by hand, and I've seen them saw enough slabs and boards that way to build a house. It was slow work. Do you know, mister, there was a saw mill run that way with one hand saw right up here in Pea Cove, and not very long ago, either, no sir.

“What would you think, mister, of a girl that worked a whole year for - what do you think - $2.00. Yes, she did housework.” Mrs. Morin: “We were up there on a visit some years ago, and I met that girl again. She was a woman then about fifty years old then and she was wearing a funny hat and funny shoes. I don't know whether you ever saw any like them or not. They had yellow metal plates on the toes. The metal went in around the sole and came up over the toe, Her hat had a very narrow brim and a very high crown, and she was wearing a homespun dress.”

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Mr. Morin: “She kept those clothes for forty years. She had just that one hat and the shoes. The people she worked for gave her a homespun dress every year. She got two dollars a year and she saved money on it.” Mrs. Morin: “We went to church together and when we came back we went up to her room and she took off her hat and her shoes and she put the shoes away in a box and the hat she put away so carefully in a tall hat box. She said it was the only hat and shoes she ever had and she wanted to keep them as long as she lived.” Mr. Morin: “The girls wouldn't save much on two dollars a year now.” Mrs. Morin: “Well, they do spend too much. They were extravagant, especially during the war.” Mrs. Morin: “Every man had to keep the road clear in front of his farm. That was so they could

get to church. There were fences on each side of the road and the snow drifted in there. Sometimes after a heavy storm it would take three weeks to get the road clear. You'd see men out there shovelling away. It used to drift back in again after it was shovelled out. Sometimes people had to go to church on snowshoes. I remember once when a boy was very sick and in danger of dying. It took a doctor three days to get to him from the nearest town on account of the deep snow.

“I don't remember that we ever had to pay any taxes up there. If we did it wasn't very much. Some of the people up there didn't have very much to eat. They got along on bread and pork sometimes quite a while.

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“I worked off and on for twenty five cents a day and after five years of that I didn't have a cent to my name. When I was nineteen I told my father I was going to Maine. I wasn't going to work all my life for nothing, and I knew I could get a dollar a day in Maine. My father says, ‘My boy, I guess you're right. We'll pack up and all of us go to Maine.’

“I couldn't speak a work of English when I got here. No, I didn't have any trouble gettin' a job or gettin' along with the others. You see, there were so many French. There were a lot of saw mills here then. There was Jordan's, Barkers, and Longleys. That was George Longley's father that run the mill. I got a job in Barkers mill. I told the boss when I went there I couldn't understand English and he says, 'that's all right, I speak French and all you got to do is understand me.’

“I worked in the saw mills, in the woods, and on the boom. When I went to work on the boom they paid the people who didn't know much about the work 75 cents a day. The old hands got a dollar a day. We got our board, too.

“Gene Mann was the boss then - you remember him? And how he could stay on a log! I've seen him jump on a log, kick the wedge out and roll it across the stream.

“One day I hollered out, ‘Hey, Gene! Would you like to have me out there with you?”

“He looked over and kept right on rolling the log.

‘Would you like to get wet, my friend?’ he says.

“I could never stay on a log. I never learned how.”

(It was possible to be a good worker on the boom and still not be able to “ride” logs. That was a highly skilled performance.)

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“One day Gene was going by where I was working and I says, ‘Look here, Gene. I can do this work just as well as those fellows over there, can't I?”

'sure you can,’ he says.

‘Well, how is it,’ I says, ‘I get only 75 cents a day while they get $1.00?’

‘What!’ says Gene. ‘You mean you get less than they do?’

'the timekeeper just went by,’ I says, ‘and he told me I was gettin' 75 cents.’

‘I'll speak to that timekeeper,’ Gene says. 'don't you worry any more. You'll get just what those fellows get.’

“Yes he was a fine man - all those Mann boys were.

“Some of those fellows certainly could stay on the logs. I was down near the river here one day, and a fellow came along that wanted to get on the other side. There was just a log there that had been in the water a long time, and it was pretty well watersoaked. That

fellow took that log and rode it across the river. He was in the water up to his waist all the time. I don't see how he did it.

“I worked on the new brick church down here. (St. Josephs). I was doing rough work and one day the boss came around and says, ‘Morin, your father was a good brick mason. I haven't got enough masons. Can't you lay bricks?’

‘I told him I built lots of chimneys and I probably could if he wanted me to.’

‘All right,’ he says, ‘come over here and start on this corner.’

‘I can't do that,’ I says, ‘I can lay bricks along the wall, but I can't work on that corner.’

‘Gwan,’ he says, ‘I got it all marked out for you. Go over there and lay those bricks.’

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“Well, I built it up five feet and I stood, back and looked at it and it was just as straight as a die. After that I called myself a bricklayer. I worked on some of the best brick buildings in the town and sometimes I go over there and look at them. They're just as good as ever.

“When I came here there was no Catholic church in Old Town. There was a small one down in Great Works and they moved that up on Water Street about two years after I got here. It was big when you remember it but that was because they built a piece on afterwards. Father Trudell was the pastor. He wasn't the pastor when the church was down in Great Works. I think it was an Irishman down there.”